Final Meeting Notes
LCR MSCP Steering Committee Meeting
(Via Go-To Meeting)
April 22, 2020

Attending

Bert Bell	Dee Bradshaw	Scott Bryon
Michael Boyles	Linda Carbone	Gil Cristobal
Chuck Cullom	Michael Curtis	Jess Gwinn
Chris Hayes	Mike Hulin	Eric Hill
Ned Hyduke	Vineetha Kartha	Jamie Kelly
Jimmy Knowles	Bill Lamb	Kara Matthews
Aaron Mead	Terry Murphy	Jessica Neuwerth
Wade Noble	Sara Price	Peggy Roefer
Carrie Ronning	Dana Sedig	Seth Shanahan
Stevie Sharp	Catherine Sites	Jon Sjoberg
Jim Stolberg	John Swett	Dale Turner
Ruth Valencia	Laura Vecerina	David Vigil

1. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Introductions

The meeting convened at 9:30 a.m. by Seth Shanahan.

Review of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed and approved (Moved by Sara Price, seconded by Vineetha Kartha, and adopted by consensus).

Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

Approve October 23, 2019 Meeting Notes

The October 23, 2019 Meeting Notes were approved (Moved by Sara Price, seconded by Bill Lamb, and adopted by consensus).

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Jessica Neuwerth said that she thought both Seth and Vineertha had been doing a great job as Chair and Vice-Chair and she moved that the Steering Committee reelect Seth Shanahan as Chair

of the Steering Committee and Vineetha Kartha as Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee. Wade Noble seconded the motion. The motion for Chair and Vice-Chair was approved and adopted by consensus.

2. MINOR MODIFICATIONS

PDD 20-001 Conserving Genetic Diversity Razorback Sucker Lake Mohave: John Swett provided an overview of the proposed language change for conservation measure RASU5. He noted that RASU5 as currently written makes certain assumptions about the razorback sucker population in Lake Mohave. These assumptions were based on work done before the program started. He noted that the goal of the conservation measure hasn't changed, it is still to protect the genetic diversity of razorback sucker in Lake Mohave.

John noted that the original goal of maintaining a population of 50,000 razorback sucker in Lake Mohave had been developed by the Native Fish Work Group in the 1980's. The plan at that time had been to stock 5,000 – 10,000 juvenile razorback suckers each year for a minimum of five, to replace the aging population of razorback suckers and maintain the genetic diversity of the population.

Repatriation of wild-born razorback suckers to Lake Mohave has met with limited success in terms of increasing razorback sucker population size. The current population estimate for razorback sucker in Lake Mohave is 3,649. However genetic analysis of larvae and repatriated adults collected during the first 15 years of program implementation have verified that the current strategy has effectively conserved the historic genetic diversity that was present in the lake in the 1990s, and has provided evidence of increased gene diversity over the last 21 years.

John noted that the 50,000 population size is not needed to maintain the genetic diversity of the population and the proposed language change better reflects the goal of the conservation measure. Jon Sjoberg noted that given our current state of knowledge, this language change makes sense. Dale Turner asked how success of genetic diversity will be defined. John noted that we have been working with geneticists to identify genetic diversity needs going forward. Instead of using population numbers to define genetic diversity, samples will be taken every year to evaluate genetic diversity within the current population.

Dale Turner asked if the term "existing" in the proposed minor modification meant as of 2020. There was discussion over whether "existing" meant at the beginning of the program or at the time the FWS approves the minor modification. It was agreed that "existing" meant at the time the FWS approved the minor modification. Jon Sjoberg noted that "existing" defined this way provides a minimum standard. Seth Shanahan noted that defining "existing" as of approval of the minor modification was a higher bar than defining it when the LCR MSCP was adopted. He also noted that defining existing this way doesn't mean that, through adaptive management, additional improvements couldn't be made.

(Moved by Jon Sjoberg, seconded by Wade Noble, and approved by consensus)

PDD 20-002 Yuma Clapper Rail Water Depth: Carrie Ronning noted that the next 3 minor modifications focus on marsh bird conservation measures. The first one is for conservation measure CLRA1. The current conservation measure requires that marsh habitat created and managed for Yuma clapper rail must maintain water levels at appropriate depths, which is defined as no more than 12 inches. The LCR MSCP has interpreted this as water levels at created marsh habitat will be maintained between 0 and 12 inches at all times.

Carrie noted that there is strong evidence from the lower Colorado River and the scientific literature that Yuma clapper rails can tolerate fluctuating water levels with depths greater than 12 inches. She noted that the 12-inch limit reduces the LCR MSCP's ability to manage and maintain suitable habitat for Yuma clapper rail by fluctuating marsh levels to encourage a mixture of cattail and rush species and manage salt levels at conservation areas.

John Swett noted that we have collected Yuma clapper rail monitoring data for over 20 years and there are many areas on the river where flow fluctuations exceed 12 inches. He noted that the Yuma clapper rails are able to adapt to a more flexible environment. John said that occupancy modeling for Yuma clapper rail was done at Topock Gorge, which has the highest concentration of Yuma clapper rail on the river. After getting more information, the LCR MSCP felt that conservation areas could be managed for greater water depth change. In discussion with the FWS and their species experts, the concern focused on minimizing water level fluctuations during breeding season to avoid impacts to nests. The proposed language specifies that created marsh habitat will generally be managed to provide for gradual fluctuations in water level during breeding season.

John noted that a question came up at the Work Group meeting over the California Endangered Species Act requirements for Yuma clapper rail habitat. John noted that a habitat management plan would be written for each of the conservation areas. For the 4 conservation areas in California, the more conservative criteria for managing Yuma clapper rail habitat would be used. Jessica Neuwerth indicated that the California parties were okay with the proposed change to the federal permit.

(Moved by Dale Turner, seconded by Vineetha Kartha, and approved by consensus)

PDD 20-003 Least Bittern Water Depth: Carrie Ronning noted that the proposed change to conservation measure LEB1 was very similar to the one for CLRA1. In reviewing the scientific literature, habitat with the highest abundance of least bittern had water level depths closer to 24 inches. She also noted that there was no significant difference found in water depths between areas with and without least bittern detections and areas with detections had depths up to 30 inches. She noted again that the 12 inch limit reduces the LCR MSCP's ability to manage and maintain suitable habitat for least bittern by fluctuating marsh levels to encourage a mixture of cattail and rush species and manage salt levels.

(Moved by Jessica Neuwerth, seconded by Dee Bradshaw, and approved by consensus)

PDD 20-004 California Black Rail Water Depth: Carrie noted that the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) states that habitat created for the California black rail must maintain water levels at appropriate depths for the species, which is defined as no more than 1 inch. The LCR MSCP has interpreted this as water levels at created marsh habitat will be maintained between 0 and 1 inch during breeding season.

She noted that the information that was used to originally inform the LCR MSCP HCP came from known habitat locations near Mittry Lake, which is managed to have very stable water levels. She noted that information we have about the species has changed. Through a literature review, it was found that the largest population of the California black rail are found in San Francisco Bay and in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in Yuba County, CA. Recent research in these areas has shown that the California black rail can adapt to spatially fluctuating water levels during the breeding season. The published literature shows that California black rails use shallow water of roughly an inch or less in depth. However, the birds utilize habitats where water depths vary daily by moving into shallower areas as water levels change.

The proposed minor modification would delete reference to Mittry Lake and the Bill Williams Delta and add language that marsh habitat would be generally managed to provide for gradual fluctuations in water levels during the breeding season. Seth Shanahan asked if the 1 inch was listed in the conservation measure. John said no it was listed in a couple of tables and figures in the HCP.

(Moved by Sara Price, Seconded by Vineetha Kartha, and approved by consensus)

3. WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

FY19 Accomplishment: John Swett provided an overview of the FY19 accomplishments. He noted that the required program for FY19 was $31,960,488 and that the Steering Committee had approved a budget of $38,398,788, which included funding for securing land and water for the Dennis Underwood Conservation Area. Actual accomplishment was $34,470,241.30. John reviewed the program accomplishment by category. He noted that funding for Fish Augmentation has been similar for the last few years. Species Research funding has declined significantly. He noted that a lot of the research has been completed. Going forward, research would focus on fish augmentation and increasing survival. He noted that funding for post-development monitoring would increase slightly over time.

Actual accomplishment was less than the approved amount by $3,928,546.70 due to construction costs being less at Mohave Valley Conservation Area and Cibola Valley Conservation Area. John noted that $1,147,832 had been contributed to the Remedial Measures Fund, bringing the total in the fund with interest to $9,142,832.05. The total amount in the Habitat Maintenance Fund with interest is $36,967,064.61. No funding was contributed to the Land and Water Fund in FY19, however $9,730,000 was withdrawn for securing land and water for the Dennis Underwood Conservation Area. The current balance in the Land and Water Fund is $5,670,000.

The group managers presented highlights from their FY19 program. The power point presentation will be included as part of the Final Meeting Materials, which will be posted to the website.

Proposed FY21 Program:

John Swett noted that the preliminary inflation rate for FY21 is 1.518. This results in minimum required program funding for FY21 of $30,332,676. John noted that Reclamation was proposing a program of $25,485,652. He noted that the proposed annual program budget is less than the minimum required funding due to current construction capability. The balance will be held in reserve by Reclamation and used in future years to complete conservation measure requirements, especially habitat creation and management activities.

Draft FY21 Work Plan and Budget Review Schedule: John noted that the Work Group meeting to review the Draft Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2021 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2019 Accomplishment Report was scheduled May 4-5 and would be held as a conference call this year. Written comments should be sent to Laura Vecerina by April 30th. He noted that the Final Report will be posted to the website by June 17th..

3. PROCESS UPDATES

John Swett reviewed the proposed strategy for updating the Program Documents to reflect approved minor modification and amendments. At the Work Group meeting the LCR MSCP proposed a short term solution to track these changes by creating a Volume VI of the Program Documents, where these changes could be located. After talking with the work group about the pros and cons of this approach, instead of incorporating the changes into the existing Program Documents, the group agreed that creating Volume VI was the best approach at this time. Seth Shanahan asked if Volume VI would be placed on the LCR MSCP website. Laura Vecerina indicated that it would be put on the website along with the other Program Documents.

4. STEERING COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

John Swett noted that the Final Implementation Report, Fiscal Year 2021 Work Plan and Budget, Fiscal Year 2019 Accomplishment Report would be posted to the LCR MSCP website by June 17th. The next Steering Committee conference call is scheduled for June 24th and the next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for October 28th. He noted that a Work Group Meeting would be scheduled in September if needed.

5. SUMMARY AND ACTION ITEMS

Seth reviewed the actions that the Steering Committee had taken action on. These included approving the agenda and the October 2019 meeting notes, the election of the Chair and Vice-

Chair, and the approval of 4 minor modifications to conservation measures RASU5, CLRA1, LEBI1, and BLRA1.

6. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.